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A False or a True Start for shaping Africa's decolonised Future?

Muchie, Mammo

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Mammo Muchie

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Phone + 45 96 35 83 91
E-mail: kramer@humsamf.auc.dk

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The Secretariat
Research Center on Development and International Relations
att: Secretary Marianne Hoegsbro
Fibigerstraede 2
Aalborg University
DK-9220 Aalborg East
Denmark

Tel. + 45 96 35 98 10
Fax. + 45 98 15 32 98

E-mail: hoegsbro@humsamf.auc.dk or jds@humsamf.auc.dk
Homepage: www.humsamf.auc.dk/development

The New Partnership for African Development (Nepad): A False Start or a True Start for Shaping Africa's Decolonised Future?*

Mammo Muchie**

NEPAD: False Start or a True Start?

If you can look into the seeds of time,
And say which grain will grow and which will not,
Speak then to me, who neither beg nor fear
Your favours nor your hate

Shakespeare, Macbeth, 1.358-61

History serves as a great reference for constructing futures. It provides the starting point- both the initial and boundary conditions-for making new moves and opening the future to human possibilities and the projection of positive goals. History is also a storehouse of the African data. It provides a mirror to look at Africa's past, present and future. Africa can only ignore to reflect its future in the mirror of its history at its own peril. Forty years has gone by, since an externally imposed development model, based on grants, loans, scanty foreign investment and unequal trade involving extraction of African mineral rights for foreign exchange to buy foreign manufactures replaced the direct colonial system. There is now a recognition that far from this externally-orientated development model denting growing poverty and inequality, it has produced debt (including debt servicing) in Africa, that has become both the highest in the world, and, more importantly, has foreclosed Africa's right to independent development.

How can Africa earn its right to develop and structurally transform? What future; what destiny for Africa: a free future or an externally manipulated future? That is the 'to be or not to be question- the so-called 'Hamletian dilemma'- that fiercely confronts as a challenge to anyone that cares about Africa. When one looks at Africa through the mirror of its history, one finds it is not Africa that has failed, but the external development model and the way it has been imposed on African politics, economics, society, governance and culture by others. It is their project of

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** Mammo Muchie is Associate Professor at Research Center on Development and International Relations, Aalborg University, Denmark.

development, their specific remedies and strategies that have been unjust. Should Africa rectify or justify the unjust system and its ideas that have failed her or not? Given the current convergence or confluence of information technology and financial services that have together formed speculative or casino capital on a global scale, it is important to ask can Africa ever make it to the promise land by playing dice in the casino world economy?

The False Polarization will hurt Africa's future

Our African leaders and even the G8 are now saying development aid has not worked. That is true- aid, loans have not worked. The alternative panacea is said to be- not aid but trade, not loans but investment. The assumption is trade and investment will succeed where grants and loans have failed.

From aid has not worked in Africa (an empirical fact), there has been an impermissible logical deduction that aid will not work in Africa. An even stronger claim is that trade and investment will work better in Africa. This has been the US's African Growth and Opportunity Act's message and now NEPAD's driving reductive and linear logic.

Beyond Africa's shores the debate on whether there is life to aid or not is taking dramatic dimensions. The US Treasury Secretary Paul O' Neil joined a tour with Bono-a rock star from Ireland on a fact-finding mission to Africa. O' Neil says to Bono: prove that aid has worked. Thus the odd duo trekked across Africa to find cases of success.

Needless to say, one does not need to make trips to know that there are and will be cases of "success", as there are many cases that can be found that have failed and were unsustainable. Need the duo trip (no pun intended) to demonstrate aid's relevance at all? As a piece of drama, yes, their trip made people watch with amusement. But as a serious act of finding what works in the fight against poverty and inequality- the action is suspect. The fact that there are some successful development projects and some failed ones cannot, should not and does not prove whether aid is successful or not. The issue of aid in relation to development is more than finding such fragments. It is different and lies beyond such fragmentary evidence. The issue is whether a vision and strategy for development is lost for the paltry money that the aid industry has been doling out to Africa.

For aid to work, it must satisfy the following conditions:

- 1) That it is disbursed in a way that builds , promotes and assists social justice in Africa
- 2) That it complements and not contradicts a clear, comprehensive African national development conceptual framework
- 3) That it is untied to conditions that expel social policy like land reform, that undermine social justice and an African national policy framework
- 4) That it is given on the basis of solidarity and not expectation of direct benefit to the donors.

If these conditions are met, aid, loan, trade and investment will work. The more will be the merrier.

Thus it is not aid, trade, investment or loans that are problems per se. It is the particular social relation that they express and reflect that has been the problem. In Africa donor aid failed because it was given to prop up allies, neutralize opponents, to pay for military bases and support counter- insurgency movements. Self-reliant and nationalist governments such as those of Nkrumah and Lumumba were undermined. The Western bureaucracies for aid management took a considerable amount of the aid budget. It is the political economy of post-war aid that was negative, not aid in itself. There were cases where two development workers earned 50 % higher than the project budget of the aid program even from Scandinavia-countries known for dealing with aid in more transparent fashion than others.

The Marshall Aid in Europe worked; US spent two per cent of its GNP to do it. It neither challenged the national policies and the independence of the Germans, the French and the British nor did it demand that their respective social-democratic consensus on which their post-war reconstruction depended be dismantled. There was no call for linking aid with deregulation of capital markets and the privatization of everything, the enclosure of all the commons and the conversion of public goods into private property. Here is, perhaps, a case, where the political economy of aid was not negative.

Africa's future lies in making self-reliance and independence the cornerstone of social transformation and the protection of the social, economic and human rights of all Africans. NEPAD is strong on the rhetoric of self-reliance, while in reality inviting dependence under the guise of establishing partnership with donors and corporations.

In Durban, Thabo Mbeki said:" It is clear that we are attempting something that is very big, necessarily difficult, but exceedingly necessary. What is critically

important for us as Africans is that we actually will move and we hope that you (international business leaders) will be our partner. We have to change."

President Obasanjo of Nigeria said: "We cannot let it fail." Haiko Alfeld, the Director of the African Economic Forum repeated: "There has never been a better time for Africa to state its case, louder than ever, that it is ready for change and open for business. The opportunity presented by NEPAD is matched by an unprecedented global commitment to fight poverty and inequality."

NEPAD tries to straddle two paradigms between African self-reliance and potential dependence on the western corporate world. Will Western business invest to provide health and education to every family in Africa or will it look after itself to make money in Africa? What is the term of the partnership that is sought? What is lost in making foreign direct investment or foreign corporations at the driving seat for African development?

There is nothing wrong in the ambition or fantasy of NEPAD to bring about self-reliant African-wide development. The issue is how, with what agency and for whom? Who loses or who gains is a relevant point to ask before NEPAD is fully confirmed as the economic program of the continent.

NEPAD aspires to provide an African national economic program where 64 billion dollars is expected to come from outside in the form of investment. It also wants Africans to be "architects of their own sustained upliftment." But it sees this aspiration to be self-reliant with freedom from the "wards of benevolent guardians." It wants instead free trade and foreign direct investment and invites the donors to become "partners." The British Prime Minister has floated 10 billion dollars that he wished to get pledged at the meeting of the G8 in Alberta Canada provided the various regimes in Africa passed a peer review audit on good governance. The kind of good governance that is expected is not related to the explicit accomplishment of social rights. It is related to making the state coy from intervention in economic and social policy so that foreign capital is free, WTO trade rules are unimpeded and the market is given prominence in the economic life of society.

Schizophrenia, Illusion and Dichotomies

Combining the rhetoric of self-reliance with a plea for dependence on international business to pour foreign direct investment in Africa is schizophrenic.

There are also two assumptions that NEPAD is premised upon. The first is not simply an assumption but a grand illusion which sees the West as ready to develop

Africa through foreign investment. That assumes a sea change in the way the West looks at Africa. The second grand illusion is that corporate power will invest to eradicate poverty and inequality in Africa. Corporations, as all private profit seeking organizations, will try to make profit. They need conditions that will make it difficult for the African State to pursue public policy in favour of social services, basic goods, the human and social rights of the majority- the ordinary people.¹

Moreover NEPAD is built on two dichotomies: that trade and investment are to be favored over loans and grants; and it is prepared to attract investment and trade based on the deregulation of the capital and current account and removal of any national control over trade. Moreover, African countries are expected to undergo a peer - review to qualify for investment and preferential trade.

In other words, like the grants and loans before them, trade and investment too will be tied with conditions that potentially can exacerbate divisions amongst African states. The conditions that African governments are expected to meet are related to making their economies more open than they are at present. Africans are expected to buy the global discourse that de-regulating trade and current and capital accounts will reduce poverty and inequality. However, creating a deregulated economic environment in Africa with fast movements of capital will exacerbate inequalities and the burden on the poor. Social justice, investment in education, health and basic needs require not vastly deregulated trade and capital markets, but action that can steer trade and investment to benefit people across society.

The issue that NEPAD has run away from is the political economy of Africa's development. That has been a problem in the early 1960s and it is still a problem now: a major blight blocking the bright light from shining over Africa's future. Our leaders have thus skirted away the main issue by hiding behind the mechanical distinction of trade not aid, and/or investment not loans. All of these- grants, loans, trade and investment- are potentially useful and can assist Africa's transformation. The trick lies in the context of their introduction: how they flow in, who manages them, where they go; the volume and rate of flow, the degree of their absorption, and what social relations they sustain, who benefits and who loses and so on. In the end what matters is accounting the political economy of aid, loans, trade and investment and their impact on the livelihood of ordinary people (i.e.whether they impart dependence on or self-reliance from the donors).

If grants, trade, investment and loans are received by making Africa lose its right to develop its education, health and basic needs, then none of these measures are useful no matter how much they flow into Africa. Development that subtracts the

human rights of Africans as it fills the pockets of others is in the end a no going area. There is a need to develop new conceptual alternatives to African development qualitatively different to the pattern of mal-development that has prevailed in Africa to this day. Unfortunately NEPAD forgets Africa's own wisdom:

"The hand that receives is always under the one that gives"

It is this African saying or proverb that should provide the logic for creating a new framework of interaction between Africa and the rest of the world. Aid, loans, trade and investment can all help, but they can also hurt. In this context, the Pan-African revival is not merely an option. It is a necessary alternative to get out of the trap of dependence and attain Africa's self-reliance and an independent voice in the world.

Why Pan-Africanism? The reason is that unity on any other basis will not bring to birth an emancipated or free Africa. Is there any other social institution that can serve as the organizing principle to bring the fullness or richness of Africa's unity in freedom? I can enumerate a number: the family, the clan, the tribe, the community, the church, the trade union, social movements, political parties, the nationality, the ethnic group, the existing artificial states or the current neo-liberal inspired creations such as the growing and conflicting or competing number of NGOs, civil society, the private sector (businesses), new regions and so on. While these institutions and identities are important and may be necessary, none of them can become the institutional instrument for bringing about a broader conception of Africa's role and place in the wider and larger scheme of things. The reason is simple: They are too dispersed, discrete and have difficulties in transforming their specific interests into a general interest. Each of these social units or arrangements leave the door open for divisions and for others who do not mean well to Africa to get in and sow discord and distrust. We must wake up to the fact that Africa's long history from ancient Egypt to the present day provides a clarion call and a compelling case for its unity. What is absent is not the rhetoric for this need of Africa's unity. There is an inflation of rhetoric inversely proportional to the deflation in action. All the governments of the OAU have signed to some notion of Pan-African ideal. But nearly two-thirds of them have not paid their dues. They thus pay lip service to the organization. Most have now ratified the AU. But judging by the way they treated the OAU, the future of the AU is uncertain. AU may be, as one analyst quipped- OAU without the "O."

What is disturbing is that there is massive hypocrisy played by the leaders: talking Pan-African and acting anti-Pan-African and, at the same time, excluding those

with committed interest to realize the political and economic unification of the continent. There is a great need for a moral and intellectual resolution and clarity to construct free Africa. Africa as a civic nation based on the emancipated citizen must be forged. Free Africa needs a new kind of being- a citizen of the African world with a globalized African soul free from petty allegiances and labels, possessing a revitalized sense of a civic-African self and personality as a premier identity.

Unfortunately the authors of NEPAD, as indeed, all our current leaders continue to play footsie with the only direction that will bring pride, strength and freedom to Africa- the Pan-African ideal and vision. They take action without a vision. And action taken without a vision often times leads to a nightmare. Time and time again they have acted to deepen Africa's nightmares. They repeat what Frantz Fanon with such incredible foresight predicted some forty years ago in his classic book: "The Wretched of the Earth." Let me paraphrase what he says on the pitfalls of a false national consciousness: The African elite discovers its historic mission to be that of only becoming an intermediary to the Western interests. And it makes its sole business to fulfill this mission without fail. It is comfortable with being a business agent of Western interests. And it plays this part without any complexes with full of ceremony and pomp, red carpet and 21-gun salute. But this lucrative connection of the African fragmented elite with the West comes at a price: growing pauperization of the African population. Some 350 million people live on a 65 cents a day income today! It plays its cheap-Jack function with a meanness of outlook towards social justice for the many in Africa. The elite lacks an independent vision, its own ambition and its own imagination different from that of the elite of the West. If the Western elite wishes to break up the Congo, the elite joins its different fractions. It thus loses virility and capacity to make history and shape events. It becomes an agent in the victimization of Africa by failing to acquire national agency to fulfill a historic mission. It acquires an agency for effectuating Africa's great betrayal. Fanon then says, lamentably absent are the dynamic, pioneering spirit, the acumen of the inventor and the discoverer of new worlds, which are found in the social groups from within the West. In Africa, the elite wallows in the marsh and spirit of indulgence. Unfortunately it learns the indulgence and decadence of the West not its spirit of innovation and inventiveness. In its very beginnings the African elite abandons national liberation for the opulence and hedonism of life from the West. Fanon ends his remarkable insight with an extraordinarily time tested remark:

"We need not think it is jumping ahead; it is in fact beginning at the end. It is already senile before it has come to know the petulance, the fearlessness, or the will to succeed of youth."

Two recent examples, one from Uganda and the other from Malawi- illustrate the continuation of the 'comprador' mentality diagnosed by Fanon a long time ago.

The Uganda case involved a scandal related to stopping money to treat HIV/AIDS. The minister of health wanted more funds to treat HIV/AIDS, and the minister of finance refused to accept funds from outside because of the impact such funds might have in overvaluing the Uganda shilling. And the minister was afraid of the IMF condition/edict to keep inflation low even at the expense of the health and education of the people would be violated. Paul O' Neil was asked about this when he was in Uganda and the story got out to all of us because he challenged the IMF's cruel priority of economics over the lives of Africans. Proof that our elites have lost their intellect, their soul as they have alienated themselves in life style from the very people they have sprung from. This is an example, amongst many, why the African elite suffers from the vice Fanon diagnosed with such precision.

The Malawi case is related to the current hunger in the region. IMF is implicated in advising the Malawi Government to sell last year's maize harvest of that country ostensibly because Malawi does not have appropriate storage facilities. The money from the sale of the country's maize was used to pay off some of the IMF loans with interest. At the moment, Malawi has no money and no maize and the country has degraded from poverty into hunger and misery. IMF, of course, could have advised Malawi to build storage facilities and store maize for lean and drought times, but that was not what interested the IMF's neo-liberal bankers. They insisted on the payback of their loans and the reduction of Malawi's indebtedness even at the risk of people potentially exposed to the wasting state of famine.

While IMF has to pursue its interests, the African official elite sings to the IMF music at the risk of spreading disease and hunger to its own people. So one can see why we cannot rely on Africa's official elite to deliver free Africa. While I am for engaging constructively with it, I am also mindful that citizens of Africa have to learn to take action. Africans from the Cape to Cairo and from inside and outside Africa have to select the seed and grain that will grow from that, that will not. We should say Africa: you deserve no more wrong turns. No more talking self-reliance and walking dependence! Africa has been wronged for thousands of years. Its hour of freedom must come. And its own children need to be sharp, discerning and emerge as a community of knowledge and resistance against injustice. They must learn to subvert that which makes them look elsewhere when they should look inside Africa and tap resources by preventing the massive embezzlement and robbery that is going on in broad day light. NEPAD must learn to stop Africa's

resources from flowing out and not seek to invite international corporations to milk further Africa's resources.

The broad history of Africans in relation to the outside world has been similar despite the various differences that exist internally. There are no permanent differences that cannot be overcome with a Pan-African vision. The current challenges Africans face worldwide are also similar. Africa's history and traditions and the common external and internal challenges the continent faces are useful resources to build a shared purpose and action to spark Africa's possible burst into a great historical future. Let it not be said that the best lack of all convictions when the fools express their foolish subservience to western interests with passionate intensity. Let us subvert in all of us the intimate enemy within the self, and learn to de-toxify our colonial personality to make all fully fit to become Africans with civic sense, civic expression and civic engagement. It is on the basis of an African citizenship, African civic identity and a positive goal and purpose shared as Africans that further trust, social networking and responsible engagement with public life will be achieved by Africa's free and equal citizens.

A shared perspective that builds on Africa's history and common contemporary challenges can be built with the ideas and practice of Pan-Africanism. One can thus see why there is a great need for building Pan-Africanism, to re-imagine Africa within the archaeology of liberation and not continue with the realities and narratives of Africa's unending oppression. There is a need to build what I shall call **'new Pan-Africanism'** as a concept, knowledge, and strategy for imagining, envisioning and building a new African world. Pan-African ideas, visions and worldviews guide, enable and make African states free and capable of creating a new, self-reliant and non-dependent partnerships with the rest of the world. Bringing Pan-Africanism back in at present is thus not to de-link but to re-link Africa with the world on a basis of a new concept of international relations. The Pan-African revival expresses the yearning to get a re-definition of the unjust linkages between Africa and the rest of the world. We must continue the battle of ideas to make NEPAD realize that no self-reliance is as effective as self-reliance coming from the foundational architecture of a united and free Africa. Let the Africa the others like to see- a jungle, a place for exotic animals, backward people run by despotic rulers, ethnic conflicts, hunger, and exporter of street sweepers, porters and maids to the West-end. Let us bring out the Africa that is seldom talked about. Africa is the home of the first humans, the mother of all cultures, the home of the first religion, the origin of the first language, the home of such great centers of learning such as Timbuktu, the source of home-grown democratic institutions. It is a great continent with distinct civilizations looking into the seeds of time and

expecting this and coming generations to transform Africa into a civic and egalitarian nation in the 21st century.

Fanon said that every generation has to discover its mission and must either fulfil it or betray it. The project of making the African civic nation built on social justice is the historic mission of the day.

¹ Cuba has followed a social policy free from conditions for providing freedom to capital flows. This has enabled Cuba to fulfill fully the social rights of the people. It has now an education and health system considered on the same standard as the developed world. The Cuban leader protested fiercely against US- Government accusations against the Cuban social system: Cuba's achievement in health and education: "is not tyranny as Mr. W. (George Bush). - calls it. It is justice and real equality among human beings." President Fidel Castro added: "Today, not a single cent has landed in the pockets of Castro and his followers... None of them can be included in the long list of neo- liberal friends of Mr. W. in Latin America who are Olympic champions of embezzlement and robbery." (Speech on June 1, 2002, Havana, Cuba). This characterization by the Cuban leader applies even more to the compradorism prevalent in Africa. NEPAD risks falling in the trap by unthinkingly copying 'free market romanticism,' and making free trade, freedom for capital as conditions for "good governance," rather than the achievement of social rights, i.e, freedom from misery and ill-being. Good governance comes with the education and health of a people not against sacrificing them in the hope of getting corporate power to develop one's country-as preached by contemporary neo- liberalism.

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